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Selected Tales.

ISABELLA: THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

BY CAROLINE H. BUTLER.

Lights still gleamed from the windows of the parsonage, although the hour of eleven had already sounded upon the stillness of the summer night, and all other casements with darkness were blended. Repose had folded her mantle about this lovely valley—the scattered cottages bathed in the full radiance of the harvest moon, from out the dark foliage of night, shone marble-like, while the fitful wail of the night-bird cleaving with dusky wing the starry depths, and the plaintive cry of the whip-poor-will alone broke this heavenly calm of nature and of man's repose.

The inmates of the parsonage had all retired save Mr. Dean, the venerable clergyman, and one old faithful domestic, whose presence might be required as witness to the sacred rite about to be solemnized.

The minutes wore on—loudly ticked the clock—chirped the cricket, and, within the leafy bowers of the eglantine which crept over the library window, fearlessly the katydid took up the burden of her song. Then the street door was heard to open gently, light footsteps crossed the hall, and a youth and a maiden stood in the presence of the holy man.

Mr. Dean looked up from the sacred page on which, until now, his eyes had rested, and greeting them with a kind smile, said: "My children, I would speak to you a few moments even with the affection of a parent—and sit down by me."

With a frank, noble bearing, his fine features wearing a determined yet serious expression, the young man advanced, tenderly supporting the trembling girl, who shrank timidly and with drooping eyes, even from the benign look of the old clergyman. Taking a hand of each, and affectionately pressing them, Mr. Dean said with great earnestness:

"My children, the relation you are about to form is one of fearful responsibility—one which no hand but death can annul, and, under the present circumstances, may be fraught with misery to you both. Once more then, ere it may be too late, consider what you are about to do, and let prudence, rather than inclination, guide your thoughts."

"Believe me, my dear sir, we have already dispassionately considered every obstacle which exists to our union," replied the young man, "but we find them so light when weighed with the evils which the postponement of our nuptials would inevitably occasion, that we are prepared to abide by the result, whether it be for weal or whether it be for woe! This morning I obtained another interview with Mrs. Ellington. Although driven off from my uncle's roof, from this house which sheltered my childhood, by that bad wo-

man, for Isabella's sake, I yet humbled myself beside her, and asked pardon for what she is pleased to term my arrogance and ingratitude. Even on my knees I swore to her that with my sword and my good name I would yet win fame and honor, would she but promise me the hand of my beloved Isabella as my reward."

"And your answer?" "Was accusation and reproach, bitter words of hate, and for this innocent girl cruel revilings! For the sake of him now dead—the father of Isabella—I checked the fierce reply which leaped to my lips, and although my hot blood turned in my veins to madness, I yet turned and left her presence without speaking! Can I, then, reverend sir, consent to leave the country for months, perhaps for years, with the dreadful uncertainty that in the mean time this dear girl may be forced to wed another—for such would most assuredly be the fact! It is for you, then, my dear sir, to put it from the power of all human agency thus to destroy our happiness."

"And you, Isabella, are you prepared to meet the trials which must follow this secret marriage? Are you not guided more by him you would call your husband, than your own unbiased judgment?" said Mr. Dean.

Throwing back the hood which shaded her lovely countenance, she raised her dark eyes, beaming with the light of love and woman's perfect trustfulness, to those of the kind old man.

"Shall I not be strong in my wifely right to contend with any trial which may press upon me?" she said. "I am very young, I know, with beautiful simplicity she added, "but I already feel there is that in woman's love, which for the sake of him she loves, shall give her endurance, patience, hopefulness!"

"Thank you, sweet Isabella," said her lover, raising her little hand to his lips. "The anger of Mrs. Ellington, Isabella, will be fearful," said Mr. Dean.

"Alas! I know it, but even that I am prepared to meet. With no unwilling ear I confess I have listened to Walter's arguments, yet it has been with more deliberation than you will, perhaps, give a simple girl like myself credit for, that I have consented to his wishes."

"Then, my dear children, I will no longer oppose your determination," said Mr. Dean.

Kneeling down, the venerable old man, in a fervent prayer, supplicated the blessing of God upon the union he was about to solemnize. And then the youthful pair stood up before him,—the sacred rite proceeded, and those solemn vows, which make the happiness or misery of life, were registered.

"And now, dearest Isabella, my own lovely bride, I must be gone!" said Walter Howard, folding her to his bosom. "Ah, how can I thus relinquish my beautiful prize even in the first moment which gives me a right to protect and cherish you, my heart's best treasure? Weep not, dear Isabella; remember you are mine—mine, dearest; even the will of your cruel step-mother must now yield to a husband's right, and there is no power on earth can sever the tie which binds our destinies."

"Be of good cheer, Isabella," said Mr. Dean, placing his hand upon the golden tresses which rested on Walter's shoulder; "sustain by your own fortune, the sink in heart of him who is now your husband. Remember your words, Isabella Howard—no longer Ellington, and be strong in your wifely rights."

For Isabella! She could not speak, but lifting her tearful eyes to his, she pressed her lips to the furrowed cheek of the old pastor.

"Come, dearest," said Walter, as he wrapped her mantle closely around her delicate form, "the night wears on, and we are detaining our reverend and beloved friend from his needful rest. Farewell, my dear sir," he continued wringing the hand of the clergyman; "guard my treasure, and by your counsel and encouragement aid her to bear the sorrows which press all too heavily upon her young heart."

"It is to God, not man, my son, you must both look for strength and consolation," replied Mr. Dean. "No harm shall come to this dear one, Walter, if my prayers can avail,—be assured I will protect her as far as lies within my power, and with God's blessing I will strive to soften the heart of Mrs. Ellington, that she may in time, take you both to her affection. Good night, my children; may our heavenly Father protect and sustain you both under your inevitable separation."

Walter Howard and his young bride then went forth from the parsonage, and slowly proceeded in the stillness of the night, through the winding path which led to Ellington Hall. They stood together for the last time beneath the shadow of the noble old elm, which, like a giant sentinel, tossing Briarrose-like its hundred arms sheathed in the silvery moonbeams, guarded the entrance to the Ellington grounds.

"Trust me, dearest, we shall soon meet again, if not on earth, in that world where sorrow and parting are unknown," said Walter; "for should I fall in that contest which now demands my sword, sure I am, my dear one, you will soon follow me." Again he enfolded her to his heart. "Isabella, the moment has come, we must now part," he continued, yet still lingering, still reluctant. At length unclasping the little arms which clung so despairingly around him, Walter broke from her embrace, and without trusting himself to look back, sprang quickly into the shrubbery, and was gone from the sight of the unhappy young wife.

From Ellington Hall our story now takes us to Mrs. Ellington's town residence in B—, one year after the scene of the preceding chapter. For weeks the theme of fashionable conversation had been the approaching grand party of Mrs. Danvers Ellington, the rich aristocratic widow, enrolling on its list, senators, statesmen, officers of the army and navy, foreign counts and ambassadors, with all the literary lions, which a month's notice could bring together from different parts of the Union. The speculations of the beau-monde upon this event at length became realities; for Time, though to many his flight seemed slackened and weary, ultimately brought round the evening of the long-anticipated fête.

The almost princely dwelling of Mrs. Ellington reflected exteriorly none of the brilliancy which, from attic to basement, gave to the whole magnificent interior a more than noonday brightness. Every bower was scrupulously closed, yet the hall door swung wide, and in the vestibule servants in full livery, their fingers cased in delicate kid, stood ready to usher guests to the dressing rooms. Carpeting of rich Brussels extended down the flight of marble steps and over the entire length of squares, that as the dainty foot of beauty left the carriage, it might not come in chill contact with the rough pavements. Of the reception-rooms, of those devoted to social chat, to music, or the dance, to the promenade, refreshments, et cetera, description would fail to do justice to their tasteful and appropriate decorations.—Leaving this point, therefore, let me introduce Mrs. Danvers Ellington, and to do so the more unreservedly, I throw open the door of that lady's dressing-room.

The lady, whose head was under the skillful hands of Monsieur Manton, the most fashionable hair-dresser in B—, was one whose countenance, at the first glance, you would pronounce brilliant—superb—far no other superlative could apply to beauty of such a character. At the second glance, you would discover in those large black eyes passions to make you shudder, and read on that lofty brow and in the haughty curl of the coral-red lip, a defiance to all the gentler influences of love, sympathy, and kindness. At the third, you would turn away with a feeling of relief, nor wish to look again, although, perhaps, for days and months, that cold, superb face would haunt your memory. A stranger would have considered himself a poor judge of the lady's age, had he pronounced her a day older than twenty-eight, or thirty at the most. She was forty. Yet so well had she preserved her rich Spanish complexion, always less liable to fade than the blonde—such was the profusion of her glossy, raven-black hair—so dazzling white and perfect her teeth, and such the graceful, still youthful, proportions of her majestic person, that Mrs. Danvers Ellington might well challenge the flight of Time, whose hand seemed but to mature, not impair, her beauty.

Wrapped in a careless but most becoming negligé of pale yellow silk, Mrs. Ellington was seated before a full-length mirror, into which her eyes flashed critically, and with an impatient meaning, as Monsieur Manton proceeded in his difficult task. At her elbow stood a young waiting-maid, holding a small looking-glass, framed in ebony and pearl, in such a manner that her lady could at the same time have a full view of the back of the head, and note the skill of Monsieur. Her small feet, incased in soft lambs-wool slippers, curiously wrought, rested upon a cushion of purple velvet—one hand hung carelessly over the arm of the lounge, the other held a small repeater, mounted with diamonds. A second waiting-maid was busily spreading out upon the elaborately decorated dressing-table, caskets of rich gems that, from their costly contents, her mistress might select those in which it might please her to adorn her even more brilliant charms.

"Stupid! really, you have lost all the taste you ever had, Manton," said Mrs. Ellington, impatiently moving her head on one side.

"C'est vrai, madame," replied Manton, with the ready tact of a Frenchman—"it is true—it is all perdu—gone—lost in de exquisite tete af mi ladi! Ah, I nevar—no nevar, can do one head so magnifique encore again!"

"Impertinence! take it down, Monsieur—it pleases me not," returned Mrs. Ellington.

"O, madame!—pardonnez moi—it is a pity—c'est dommage!" said poor Manton aghast.

"There sir,—now will you do as I bid you!" and with one sweep of her fair hand, and a toss of her queeny head, the long tresses of Mrs. Ellington were free from come and bodkin.

"O, Mon Dieu!" shrugged the discomfited artist, and again he commenced his difficult task. Fortunately, for himself, he was more successful in this second attempt.

"Catherine, now hand Monsieur my diamond spray," said Mrs. Ellington. And Manton finished his work by arranging, amid her rich ebony tresses, a superb diamond, the intrinsic value of which would have been a life subsistence to many a hard-working son or daughter of poverty.

"Very well, Monsieur, I see you have recovered your skill," she said, glancing carefully at her mirror. "Now, Alice, go to Miss Ellington's room, and see if she is ready for Monsieur."

In a few moments, the girl returned, saying that Miss Ellington was suffering from a severe headache, and would not require the services of Monsieur Manton.

"How!—what is that you say!—a headache!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellington, angrily; and, rising from her seat, "You need not go, sir," with a wave of her hand to Manton—"you will be wanted." Then gather-

ing up the silken folds of her robe, that its length might not impede her haste, she swept from the room, and crossing the perfumed gallery, amid the blaze of a hundred wax-lights, unceremoniously pushed open the door of her daughter's chamber, and like a beautiful serpent glided within.

Her keen eye, piercing the imperfect light which the dim argand cast over the apartment, found not the object it sought; approaching the lamp, she quickly touched the spring, and the smothered flame leaped up clear and bright at her bidding. Then, with noiseless footsteps upon the soft carpet, she crossed the room, and sweeping away the heavy curtains of ruby damask which fell over a deep recess, disclosed the kneeling figure of a young girl, her face buried in the cushions of a fauteuil.

"And so it seems, you must fight illness to defeat my wishes!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellington, grasping the shoulder of her daughter.

"O no, mother, not feigned! I am really very ill," she replied, raising her pale face, bedewed with tears, and putting back from her brow with one little hand, her disordered tresses.

"Isabella, you are not ill—it is a subterfuge, or if you are, it matters not—arise and make your toilet speedily," said Mrs. Ellington.

"Mother—mother—indeed I am not able to join the company this evening," replied Isabella, rising from her knees, yet still leaning against the chair for support; "feel my hands, h-w-hot they are, and my head swims so—indeed, mother, I am very ill!"

"I might have expected this—I might have known you would thwart me, as you ever have, in all my plans!" said Mrs. Ellington, in a cold, taunting tone.

To this reproach there was no answer but tears.

Like a well-trained actress, Mrs. Ellington now suddenly assumed a different manner—the stormy brow became smooth and calm as a summer twilight—the haughty, compressed lips parted with a smile, as placing her hand gently on the arm of Isabella, she said,

"Come, Isabella, there is surely no need of tears; but indeed, my dear, you must gratify me to-night, and by your loveliness eclipse all others—that is, in the eyes of one I could name to you. I have a famous cordial, which will relieve your head, and I will send Catherine to assist you in dressing—Manton, too, is waiting for your summons—and, by the way, how do you like my head this evening? Come, sit down, we have yet an hour, good, and I want to have a little chat with you—Now, Isabella, do you know why I have imposed upon myself so much fatigue as to throw open my house this evening?"

"Alas! mother—you told me it was upon my account, and I would gladly have spared you the trouble," answered Isabella, sadly.

"Yes it is on your account. I can no longer suffer you, Isabella, to seclude yourself from society—no longer give strength to the tongue of scandal by countenancing such folly."

"Scandal!" exclaimed Isabella, starting as if from the sting of some poisonous reptile.

"Yes, scandal!" answered Mrs. Ellington, fastening her eye keenly upon the face of her step-daughter, to watch the effect of her words. "That mysterious affair of yours with your cousin Walter—"

"Mother—forget!" cried Isabella.

"No; you must hear me," continued Mrs. Ellington. "Your fair fame has already been trifled with—there are those who dare whisper strange tales of one so young, and who should, therefore, be so pure—those who shrug their shoulders, and leer as if they held some disgraceful fact which, if uttered, would cover you with shame. Ah! it is well for you, Isabella, that you are not the daughter of a poor widow—else, who would have spared you? go! I have a refining process!"

"My heavenly Father knows my innocence—for the world I care not—only let me die, mother—only let me die!" cried Isabella.

"Foolish child, don't talk of dying—there, lift up your head and hear me—Among the guests this evening will be the Count de Breuil, an attaché of the French minister. He has seen you at the studio of young Haven, and, I am told, spends hours gazing upon the exquisite, yet truthful copy, the artist has given of your features. He has sought an introduction to me, and I have extended to him an invitation for this evening. Now it needs but a little finesse on your part, Isabella, to complete a conquest already nearly achieved, and to bring him to your feet. Methinks the title of Countess would well become you—and then who shall dare to breathe aught against the Countess de Breuil!"

No longer pale, no longer passive, Isabella started to her feet. Even the finished woman of the world, whose self-possession was no more easily moved than her self-will, quailed beneath her indignant glance as she said:

"Do I understand you, mother? Have I heard aright? You, who so well know the anguish of my heart—you, who so well know my sufferings at the untimely death of him, who, in the sight of God, was my husband?"

"Your husband, girl! your husband!" interrupted Mrs. Ellington, livid with passion. "Now this is too much to call Walter Howard your husband! mark me, Isabella Ellington, had he lived, you should sooner have wed the grave than have gone to the altar with that ingrate!"

Isabella stood firm before the angry woman, in all the majesty of youthful innocence.

"Mother, the time has come when I must speak—when my over-burdened heart can no longer support the sorrows and the indignities you have pressed upon it! Do you talk of slander—of my injured fame. Do you say that the fair name of your husband's child is blotted by foul calumny! Let me ask you mother, whence came these reports? from whose mouth did that whisper of reproach speed forth? Who drove the generous, noble Walter Howard forth an outcast from his uncle's roof, to die—alas! to lose his young life upon the battle-field! And shall I tell you why—God forgive me—he rejected the hand of his uncle's widow!"

"Isabella! girl, beware! do you dare say this to me?" almost screamed Mrs. Ellington, and clenching the arm of Isabella so tightly that the impress of her fingers remained purple on the pure white flesh.

"Yes! I do dare to speak it, for it is the truth. And yet you know how he loved me," she continued in a softened tone. "You know my whole being was bound in his—mother, you knew before you married our love, that he had already smothered our love, although we were but children—and yet, with bitter hate and jealousy, abusing the power which my beloved father's will had given you in his blind affection, you destroyed us both!"

"May God forgive you, mother—but the death of Walter Howard is on your conscience!"

Mrs. Ellington raised her hand—that beautiful white hand, whose long, taper fingers glittered with gems, to strike the brave, wronged Isabella—but, with an energy of which her delicate frame seemed incapable, Isabella arrested the blow, and then sinking on her knees before her, she said:

"O mother, do not strike me—it will only be a sharp blow to your own heart in your old age, mother, when I shall be at rest in the grave! Forgive me for the words I have spoken. You were the beloved wife of my father, and from you, therefore, I should bear without reproach."

To this Mrs. Ellington made no answer, but rising haughtily from her seat, she said, as she left the room, in a voice of bitter irony:

"Your admirable acting of the Distress of Heroine, Miss Ellington, has added a brilliant object to your charms—converted a Niece into a Hebe! Now dress yourself quickly—such beauty must be lost—no more headaches—remember, I am not to be failed!"

And Isabella, heart-broken as she was, only arose to a momentary energy, and again supine, dared not to disobey, and, although sick and heavy-hearted, began her toilet.

The features of Mrs. Ellington were a fleecy expression of malignant joy as she sought her private dressing-room to recover from the agitation into which this interview had thrown her.

"She knows not that he still lives!" she cried exultingly—"that even this very day I have received private information of his safety, though left for dead on the plains of Buena Vista! Yes, she shall marry the Count de Breuil, and the lovesick fool return to find his Isabella the wife of another! And then—he may no longer slight the love I have already proffered him—this hand, holding out the tempting bait of riches, may succeed where my charms have failed, in bringing him to my feet. What computations need I have—she is no child of mine, and, by heavens, I will be revenged upon her!" Then glancing at her repeater, Mrs. Ellington summoned her attendants, and hastily concluded her toilet.

Even at an earlier hour than usual for Fashion to call her votaries together, were the rooms of Mrs. Ellington rapidly filling with the gay throng, yet, of all that rare assemblage of loveliness, none could surpass the fair hostess herself either in beauty of person, or in grace and dignity of manner. Leaning on her arm was Isabella, timidly shrinking from the approach of the crowd, from whom her youth and extreme loveliness, although somewhat shadowed by an air of melancholy, called forth many expressions of surprise and admiration.

Nor was this all, for even as Mrs. Ellington had hinted, and through her own artful agency it was, some other feeling seemed at work here and there within the circle. Scandal hissed her venom through the lips of beauty—O how unmeet to issue thence!—and there were those, too, among the gentlemen, to whom poisonous hints had been conveyed, who shrugged their shoulders, and levelled their eyes-glasses with an air of freedom at the wronged Isabella, whose beautiful eyes, downcast, scarce noting the gay throng around her, remained happily unconscious of their insolence.

Suddenly touching the arm of Isabella with her fan, Mrs. Ellington said, in a low whisper—

"Now arouse yourself, you have acted the languishing beauty long enough; here comes the Count. Remember our late conversation."

And then, with a radiant smile, advancing a step to meet the gentleman who now drew near, she held out her fair hand to welcome him, and then presented him to Isabella as the Count de Breuil.

Isabella did indeed remember the conversation with her mother, yet the embarrassment with which she met his salutation, the Count failed not to attribute to a cause most flattering to his self-love, and her manner became cold and indifferent, he still remained by her side, his eyes looking the admiration which his tongue would have spoken. It was now Mrs. Ellington's tact to leave Isabella with the Count.

"I shall certainly pass for an over-fond mother," she said, "if I shelter you longer under my wing, Isabella; therefore, Count,

another hour, Isabella, shall you remain under this roof? No longer a poor soldier, thanks to my good sword and my country's bounty, your husband has now both wealth and station to bestow upon you, and a happy home, dearest, now awaits your presence. Come, my Isabella! But let us first seek Mrs. Ellington, in the presence of those to whom she has dared to slander you, I will proclaim you my wife—the wife of Col. Walter Howard!"

In the meantime, with her usual consummate address, Mrs. Ellington had been laboring to regain the confidence of the Count, and to convince him that Isabella had acted, not from her true sentiments, but from a little spice of coquetry.

"O no, Count! you are little schooled in woman's wiles," she said, "if you take her first word thus seriously. Come, don't be disheartened—I tell you she is yours—yes, yours, believe me, with the same willingness with which I, her mother, yield her up to your future protection."

There was so much sincerity in the manner this was uttered as almost reassured the Count. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Ah, madam! thanks. You inspire me with some faint hope that I may be mistaken—yet there was that in the manner of Miss Ellington which I fear but to well confirmed her words."

"My dear Count, all acting—all pretence, I assure you. I know her better than you do. Why she is as arant a little coquette as was ever emancipated from the thralldom of a governess! We will seek her again Count—he not discouraged by a woman's frown!"

"Miss Ellington is now entering the room, madam—by heavens, how beautiful she is! But who is that fine-looking officer on whose arm she leans? Now would I peril my salvation for one of those sweet smiles!" exclaimed the Count.

There was one moment in which Mrs. Ellington lost her self-command—for one moment the pallor of death chased the brilliant color from her cheeks and lips, and she leaned heavily on the arm of the Count, as if all nerve and strength were paralysed—then, as suddenly recovering her self-possession, she stood firm, with haughty brow, every evil passion raging within her breast, to await the approach of those two beings whose destruction she had planned, thus suddenly appearing before her maddening gaze in all the brightness of love and happiness.

No longer was the face of Isabella pale and sad. Her every feature was radiant with joy, and, with a step light as her heart, she now trod the rooms, leaning on the arm of her husband.

On passed the youthful pair—music breathing its entrancing strains around them, and the gay throng, moved with mingled wonder and admiration, following with their eyes, and many-whispered surmises their graceful forms.

"Your presence here, sir, is an insult!" said Mrs. Ellington, in reply to the distant salutation of Howard.

"Pardon me, madam," he answered with imperturbable coolness; "I came but to relieve you from your maternal charge of my wife, Mrs. Isabella Howard, and have now the honor, madam, of taking my leave. Come, Isabella, you have now a husband's heart and home to flee to—pay your parting compliments to Mrs. Ellington."

"Mother, will you not say farewell?" said Isabella, offering her little hand.

But Mrs. Ellington turned scornfully away, and Walter Howard and his beautiful bride passed forever from her dwelling.

What o'clock it is.

When I was a young lad, my father one day called me to him, that he might teach me to know what o'clock it was.

He told me the use of the minute finger and the hour hand, and described to me the figures on the dial plate, until I was pretty perfect in my part.

No sooner was I quite master of this additional knowledge, than I set off scampering to join my companions in a game of marbles; but my father called me back again. "Stop, William," said he, "I have something more to tell you."

Back again I went, wondering what else I had got to learn, for I thought I knew all about the clock as well as father did.

"William," said he, "I have taught you to know the time of day. I must teach you how to find out the time of your life."

All this was strange to me; so I waited impatiently to hear how my father would explain it, for I wanted sadly to go to my marbles.

"The Bible," said he, "describes the years a man to be threescore and ten or fourscore years. Now, life is very uncertain and you may not live a single day longer, but if we divide the fourscore years of an old man's life into twelve parts, like the dial of a clock it will allow almost seven years for every figure. When a boy is seven years old, then it is one o'clock of his life; and this is the case with you. When you arrive at 14 years old, it will be two o'clock with you, and when 21, it will be three o'clock, and at 28, it will be four o'clock; at 35, it will be five o'clock; at 42 it will be six o'clock; at 49, it will be seven o'clock; should it please God to spare your life. In this manner you may always know the time of your life, and looking at the clock may remind you of it. My great grandfather, according to this calculation, died at 12 o'clock my grandfather at 11, and my father at 10. At what hour you or I shall die, William, is only known to Him to whom all things are known."

Never, since then, have I heard the inquiry, "What o'clock it is?" nor do I think I have ever looked at the face of a clock, without being reminded of the words of my father.

And away glided this true woman of the world, dispensing on all sides the most courteous salutations—complimenting the vain, flattering the self-love of the egotist, drawing forth the particular shining traits of each one, and giving to all a feeling of perfect self-satisfaction and pleasure.

Mentioning the Count paid assiduous court to Isabella, who received his attentions with an air of coldness not very flattering to an admirer.

"Ah, there's Mr. Haven, the artist," he said; "I am glad to see him here this evening; he is decidedly a man of genius; as such I honor him, and am proud to call myself his friend; but that is not all—I owe him a deep debt of gratitude also."

Isabella raised her eyes enquiringly,—the Count smiled.

"Ah, I see, fair made-moiselle, you are thinking he once saved my life;—no, but he gave me a new life by first presenting to me those charming features on which my eyes now rest. Do I not owe him something for so great a happiness?"

"Flattery, sir, I detest."

"Flattery! reproach me not with such a suspicion. Flatter you!" exclaimed the Count, "no, upon my soul, I deem you above it! I adore you, Miss Ellington; yet pardon, I beseech you, this adroitness, which will deem me bold, presumptuous, upon an acquaintance so brief, to address you in this manner. I only ask for your permission to visit you with the hope that I may, in time, win the inestimable treasure of your love."

"I cannot listen to you, Count de Breuil," said Isabella, firmly, "I entreat of you, sir, if you are sincere, and have the regard for me that you profess—I beg of you, never let this subject be renewed. Although your confession does me honor, my hand can never be yours."

"Stay, Miss Ellington—one word more; believe me, I mean not to importune you," exclaimed the Count; his countenance betraying much emotion, as Isabella was about to leave him. "Your mother has led me to hope that your affections were not engaged—has given me to understand that you were willing to sanction my addresses—how then am I to interpret your words?"

What could Isabella answer? To exculpate herself from a charge so unimpeachable, she must, perforce, impeach the veracity of Mrs. Ellington; this she was too generous to do, while, to complete her embarrassment, the searching eyes of the Count were riveted upon her speaking countenance, awaiting her reply.

At this moment Mrs. Ellington joined them. A glance sufficed to show her that she probably arrived just in time to prevent a complete overthrow of her schemes. Licking her lips, therefore, within that of the Count, she dexterously drew him away, under the plea that his presence was required to decide upon the merit of some painting.

No longer able to support a scene so unbecoming to her almost bursting heart, Isabella glided, unobserved, from the brilliant throng. She bent her steps toward the conservatory, and, putting aside the fragrant leaves and blossoms inventing the element, threw up the window to court the cool night breeze, so grateful to her fevered brow.

She looked upon the glorious heavens, and the gentle voices of the stars seemed to whisper peace to her troubled heart.—The thoughts of Isabella soared from earth—a blissful serenity pervaded her bosom—the spirit of her loved Walter seemed near her.

"Yes, dearest Walter, I shall soon follow you," she exclaimed. "We shall soon meet again—if not on earth, in heaven!" said Isabella.

"Hark! did she dream?"

"He calls me!" she said aloud. "He summons me to the spirit-land!"